

Monday, November 17, 2003
7 pm. Walter Hall

University of Toronto
Faculty of Music
Chamber Music Series
Presents

Nexus Percussion Ensemble

Bob Becker, Bill Cahn, Robin Engelman, Russell Hartenberger, Garry Kvistad

PROGRAMME

Sound Sculpture

A Nexus Improvisation

Nimmons 'n Nexus

An Improvisation featuring Phil Nimmons, clarinet

INTERMISSION

Russell Hartenberger

The Invisible Proverb

Okarche
Drumtalker
Darkwater
Sky Ghost

Peter Schickele

Percussion Sonata No. 2 "Woodstock"

Variations
Pastorale; Toccata

Bob Becker, arr.

Bye Bye Medley

The Chamber Music Series has received generous support from the estate of the late Rubye Halpern and The Wolfe and Millie Goodman Foundation.

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Programme Notes

Sound Sculpture

The first concerts by Nexus were totally improvisatory. We all collected a number of instruments from our searches in music stores, antique shops, import stores and garage sales, and from our individual travels to other countries. We first gathered these instruments together on Kilbourn Hall stage at the Eastman School of Music for a concert in May of 1971. For several years after that we played concerts of improvisation. We have continued to play improvisations as a part of our standard concert programming ever since.

Garry Kvistad, who joined Nexus a year ago in the first personnel change of our career, has brought a new aspect of improvisation to the group with his Baschet sound sculptures and other musical creations. *Sound Sculpture* is an homage to improvisation and an introduction of a new sound to the music of Nexus.

Nimmons 'n Nexus

Nexus and Phil Nimmons have been partners in music making for many years. We all have a love of improvisation and freedom in music. Nexus is honored to be able to perform with Phil, one of the true giants of Canadian music.

The Invisible Proverb

RUSSELL HARTENBERGER

"Deep in the heart of West African myth, buried under the layers of rhythm and song, lies a magical drum proverb. The magical powers it holds will remain passive until a courageous drummer can complete the difficult quest for the meaning of the proverb. Drumtalker, the master musician of his village, takes in Okarche, an orphan boy. As Okarche is raised by the wise man, he learns the traditional rhythms of his people. He becomes enchanted by

Drumtalker's music, and the invisible powers the drum proverbs seem to have over listeners. Enchanted by a single proverb in particular, Okarche questions his mentor as to its interpretation. Drumtalker only laughs and replies that Okarche must discover the meaning alone. He directs the boy to Darkwater Lake, a journey that would take seven weeks and five days to complete. An ambitious boy with nothing to lose, Okarche sets out for the lake, encountering obstacles of fatigue, hunger and loneliness, but never a lack of faith. Finally arriving at Darkwater Lake, Okarche sits at the edge of the water and lets his tired feet soak in the cool spring. He peers into the water, expecting to see his reflection staring back with heavy eyes and a dirt-stained face. However, Okarche sees no reflection; looking up to the sky, he sees no stars. Instead, he senses only darkness, and knows that he is in the presence of the mystical Sky Ghost. Instinctively, Okarche takes out his drum and begins to play. He closes his eyes and plays faster, faster than he has ever played before. Suddenly, his perception shifts. He notices the way emptiness and objects surround him to make space; the way notes and silence combine to form music. Feeling empowered by this epiphany, Okarche stands up and watches as the stars reappear in the sky. He begins the voyage back to his village, eager to join Drumtalker and enchant his people with his drumming."

— Laura Hartenberger

Composed during 2001 and 2002, The Invisible Proverb uses elements of talking drum styles and the rhythm patterns of West African drumming ensembles. Okarche and Darkwater use atenteben flute melodies from Ghana and elements of the horn ensembles of Central Africa. Sky Ghost is based on some of the musical material from the song Small Sky by Toru

Takemitsu. The Small Sky melody appears in the first section of the piece. In the second section, the talking drum melodies are heard against a backdrop of African bell patterns played on a xylophone. There are, in essence, two bell patterns heard at once. The left hand plays a five-note pattern while the right hand "ghosts" a seven-note pattern against it. The third section reverses this procedure while the melody reappears. — *Russell Hartenberger*

Percussion Sonata No. 2 "Woodstock" **PETER SCHICKELE**

The idea of writing for percussion ensemble is one that had intrigued me for years, so it was highly felicitous that I received two back-to-back commissions, one for a rather large ensemble, and the other for five players. And, since both works were premiered at places that have figured importantly in my own life, and that have resonant names because of their musical reputations, it seemed natural to give the pieces geographical subtitles. The first sonata, for 11 or more players, was premiered in Aspen, Colorado, during the summer of 1996.

The second sonata uses a variety of instruments, but concentrates on those played with mallets. The first movement is a set of variations on an original theme. The first section of the second movement acts as an interlude, and features the bars of the vibraphone played with a string bass bow; the background to this solo consists of four different wind chimes, which make the section beautiful but almost a bit embarrassing, since because of this the piece might be accused by cultural purists of being a commercial for Woodstock Chimes, the company that commissioned the work. Garry Kvistad, who founded

Woodstock Chimes and created the Woodstock Chimes Fund (through which the sonata was commissioned), started a tradition in the early 1990s of presenting an annual percussion concert in Woodstock (NY) to benefit the Woodstock Guild, and this work was commissioned for, and premiered at, the sixth annual concert on July 19, 1997. The fast section of the second movement is a sort of a rondo; the recurring material is more of a harmonic progression than a theme (which might also be said of some of the Bach preludes, such as the famous opening of the Well-Tempered Clavier).

The sonata was completed in the spring of 1997. The performers at the premiere were Bob Becker, Stacey Bowers, Russell Hartenberger, and Garry and Rick Kvistad. — *Peter Schickele*

Bye Bye Medley **BOB BECKER, ARR.**

During the 1920s and 30s the xylophone as a solo instrument enjoyed a true "golden age". Xylophonists appeared with piano accompaniment, in dance orchestras and concert bands, and as novelty acts throughout the vaudeville theatre circuit. They were also featured regularly on phonograph records and radio broadcasts, and in animated cartoons and motion pictures. *Bye Bye Medley*, arranged by Bob Becker in 2000, features two great Tin Pan Alley songs from the 1920s. The first is Ray Henderson's famous stop-time melody *Bye Bye Blackbird* (lyrics by Mort Dixon) which is still popular as a jazz standard. Second is *Bye Bye Blues*, written by Fred Hamm, Dave Bennett, Bert Lown and Chauncey Gray. An old banjo favorite, this tune was often used as a virtuoso show-piece by xylophonists as well. ■

Biographies

The first, entirely improvised NEXUS concert in 1971 marked the formation of a group that would touch and entertain people of all levels of musical learning, in all genres of percussion music. Bob Becker, Bill Cahn, Robin Engelman, Russell Hartenberger and Garry Kvistad are virtuosos alone, and bring elements of their knowledge and character to a distinct and powerful whole. They stand out in the contemporary music scene for the innovation and diversity of their programs, their impressive history of collaborations and commissions, their revival of 1920's novelty ragtime xylophone music, and their influential improvisatory ideas. NEXUS' firm commitment to music education and a steady output of quality CD recordings and compositions by its members continues to enhance the role of percussion in the 21st century.

NEXUS' music, with its widespread appeal, has taken the group on tours of Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Brazil, Scandinavia, Europe, and regularly to the United States and Canada. NEXUS is proud to have been the first Western percussion group to perform in the People's Republic of China. They have also enjoyed participating at international music festivals such as the Adelaide, Holland, Budapest Spring, Singapore Arts, Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Blossom Music Festivals, as well as the BBC Proms in London, Music Today and Music Joy festivals in Tokyo, and many World Drum Festivals. NEXUS is the recipient of the Banff Centre for the Arts National Award and the Toronto Arts Award. NEXUS was inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 1999, just before celebrating their 30th anniversary season.

Especially renowned for their improvisational skills, NEXUS was called upon to create the chilling musical score for the Academy Award-winning feature-length documentary "The Man Who Skied

Down Everest". Television and radio broadcasters such as the CBS TV, PBS, and CBC have regularly featured this leading percussion ensemble. NEXUS' list of high-profile collaborations includes the Kronos Quartet, the Canadian Brass, clarinetist Richard Stoltzman.

Toru Takemitsu, a great friend to NEXUS, composed one of their signature pieces, "From me flows what you call Time". This work, written with each NEXUS member's personality in mind, was premiered for Carnegie Hall's centennial celebration in 1990 with Seiji Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Compelled to share their insatiable curiosity, knowledge, and passion for their art, NEXUS has contributed greatly to musical education with symphonic and solo programs for family audiences from "The Story of Percussion in the Orchestra" to their concert, "An African Celebration". Internationally, they have participated in high school, college and university residencies giving masterclasses, workshops and concerts. NEXUS members consistently write compositions that become core repertoire for percussion ensembles.

Highlights of the upcoming season include the release of their new CD "Drumtalker" and the premiere of an important new work for percussion and chamber orchestra by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. NEXUS will perform the work in the spring of 2004 with the IRIS Orchestra of Memphis and conductor Michael Stern. Other highlights for NEXUS will include concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony. September, 2003

NEXUS wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Phil Nimmons is a legend in his own time and unique in Canada as a performer, composer, educator, clinician and artistic director of music programs. After graduating in pre-Medicine at the University of British Columbia, Phil made an early career move when he accepted a scholarship to study at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. Later, he did post-graduate studies with composer John Weinzwieg at the University of Toronto. Phil is a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers and also founded, with Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown, the Advanced School of Contemporary Music in the 1960s. Phil was the first artistic director of summer jazz programs at the Banff School of Fine Arts, University of Toronto, York University, Courtney Youth Music Centre, and others. He was involved in the New West Jazz Clinic, introduced the jazz program at the University of Western Ontario, is an inspired adjudicator with MusicFest Canada and a popular clinician for Yamaha Music Canada. Phil has taught at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto for over 20 years. He influenced the inauguration of the Jazz Studies Program there and is currently its Director Emeritus.


Phil is a prolific, multimedia composer of original contemporary classical and jazz compositions and an arranger of music written for stage, television, radio, theatre and film. He recorded extensively in the 1960s and 1970s with Nimmons 'N' Nine and the larger Nimmons 'N' Nine Plus Six on Verve, RCA and Sackville labels. His recently released double CD published by Sackville Records is a compilation of earlier jazz classics (The Atlantic Suite, Suite P.E.I.) and Tributes. Previous unpublished, Tributes is a collection of seven works which acknowledge and honour "people and events that have touched my life," says Phil. Amongst these are: *EEE-Suave* for Duke

Ellington, *Ros* for Frank Rosolino, *Think Nice Thoughts* for Ted O'Reilly, and *Birdburger* for David Bird, former producer of *Jam Canadiana/Jazz Radio Canada*.

Phil is a virtuoso clarinetist who plays daily to maintain technique and to discover new sounds on the horn and ways of reaching them. His jazz solos are unique, often "outside," always cerebral and frequently as whimsical as the man.

Phil has always been recognized by his peers and students for his tremendous contributions to jazz in Canada. In November 2002, he was among a group of Canada's most illustrious artists to be honoured with the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for lifetime artistic achievement. In January 2001 he became the first non-American to be inducted into the Jazz Educators Hall of Fame, organized by the International Association of Jazz Educators. The first recipient of the Toronto Arts Award for Creative Excellence in Music, his formal awards also include the Juno Award, Jazz Reports awards for clarinet performance, and others. Canada officially acknowledged Phil's work in 1994 when he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada and a member of the Order of Ontario. He was cited for "his significant contribution to the cultural life of Canada...and for being largely responsible for bringing jazz into the mainstream of music in Canada through radio performances, concerts, workshops and classrooms." As a clarinetist, composer, bandleader and teacher, he has contributed to the success of established musicians and influenced the careers of generations of younger musicians.

Phil continues the legend by inspiring young musicians and being a tireless advocate of jazz as a significant art form...into the next millennium.



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Kenneth Peacock was a distinguished alumnus of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. His body of work, as a composer and researcher for half a century, has made a significant impact on musical life in Canada. The Faculty of Music was very grateful to learn that Mr. Peacock had made a bequest to the University of Toronto in his will for the benefit of our music programs. With this legacy gift, the Faculty of Music will establish the Kenneth H. Peacock Lecture Series in Music in keeping with his lifelong interest in and contribution to the multi-dimensional study of music. Thank you Mr. Peacock.

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Our chamber music program will be the focus of much attention this year, not only on stage but in the classroom as well. For the stage, we have inaugurated this new Monday evening Chamber Music Series. For the classroom, we are working to create a Visiting Chamber Groups program. This program would see five renowned chamber ensembles at the Faculty annually, each for several days of masterclasses, ensemble coaching and a guest performance as part of our Chamber Music Series. The St. Lawrence String Quartet is at present the only chamber group currently engaged by the Faculty of Music as regular visiting artists. We are determined to retain our association with this quartet and secure additional arrangements with one more string ensemble, a piano chamber group (like the Gryphon Trio), one wind quintet, and a brass group.

To learn more about how your financial support can help make this academic priority a reality, please contact Marilyn Brown at 416-946-3145.

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